

Mrs. Ford's Remarks
Bennington Arts Center Dedication
Saturday, May 22, 1976

Hemingway once wrote: "If you were lucky enough to have lived in Paris as a young man, then wherever you go for the rest of your life, it stays with you for Paris is a moveable feast."

I feel about Bennington the way Hemingway felt about Paris. Some of the intensity, joy and excitement of those summers at the Bennington School of the Dance stayed with me.

When I drove up to the campus today---what memories came back! I remember being barefoot most of the time and wearing a leotard from dawn to dusk. Between classes we bounced around the green and tried to pick up as much grass as possible with our toes. That exercise was one of Martha Graham's orders. After the first few days, our muscles were so sore we went up and down the stairs on our bottoms. We breathed we ate, we slept---nothing but dance. Oh what a glorious feeling!

The 30's were such an exciting time for dance. Martha Hill drew people to Bennington, which put it in the middle of this excitement.

She orchestrated the talents and temperaments, and we learned from Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, Hanya Holm, Charles Weidman and others.

When I came in 1936, I had been studying dance for ten years. I already knew I wanted to be a dancer, but Bennington opened up the doors for the much too brief years I spent in New York with Martha Graham.

I felt I had been born to dance as I think most of the students did. It was our whole life, and Bennington and Martha Hill helped focus our intense commitment.

Bennington educated audiences for contemporary dance during those summers. The summer school and the establishment of a major in dance at Bennington were very important breakthroughs. But for those of us who studied here, Martha Hill, Martha Graham and others gave us something else. They touched our hearts with fire and infused us with spirit. Isn't that what the arts are about? Nourishment for the soul.

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The arts, especially for me the dance, draw out our emotions and make us more alive. Very often the arts help me to see life in a new way.

Dance, music, theater, art and literature are our communication with the future---our spiritual links with the past.

For some, today is a visit to the Paris of our youth and a time to honor Martha Hill's contributions to dance. For all; it is a day to be glad about this marvelous arts center.

But more than personal memories and thanks, we are here to share our faith in the creative forces of the arts.

The creative spirit reminds us of the passion and the anguish of life. This helps us leave for those who come after "our letter to the world."

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